JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
THE MOTETS

Washington Bach Consort

Pro Organo

J. Reilly Lewis, conductor

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During Bach's tenure in Leipzig, he was dependent for his livelihood in no small part on the fees he received for providing music for funerals. This is evident from a letter to Georg Erdmann of 1730, lamenting the high cost of living and bad working conditions in Leipzig. Bach complains bitterly that the previous year's "healthy wind" had caused the death rate to fall, depriving him of more than 100 thaler.

When a particularly prominent or wealthy citizen died, Bach would be commissioned to compose a new motet for the occasion. Specific biblical texts would be chosen by the bereaved family or would be requested in the will. For specially commissioned motets, Bach had the best singers available, and thus could employ very difficult contrapuntal writing in five to eight parts. These compositions were the closest Bach came to writing in the old *a cappella* style of the Latin motet. They were not performed unaccompanied, however, but with the addition of continuo instruments. In at least some cases, instruments were employed to double all of the voice parts as well.

Typically, Bach used both the chosen biblical passages and a chorale text on the same subject, with its traditional melody. The contrast or interaction between the

two sources of text – biblical and choral – and the extent to which the chorale melody itself is used are among the determining elements of the form of the motets. In this respect, as in so much of his music, Bach was following 17th century tradition (the tradition of the "Cantor's motet"), but he brought the form to a new complexity and increased the length. In spite of the lack of independent instrumental parts, Bach employs all kind of compositional techniques – imitative counterpoint, double fugues, chorale preludes, concerto form, polychoral writing, and so forth – in the interests of expressing the meaning of the text. Consequently a high degree of virtuosity on the part of the singers is essential.

Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied, BWV 225, is for double choir in three movements. The nature of its commission is uncertain. The joyous character of the text makes it probable that it was not composed for a funeral, but for a festive occasion such as New Year's Day. Its year of composition is also not clear, but is probably no earlier than 1726. The first movement, its text from Psalm 149, begins as a polychoral piece with the two choirs in dialogue, and concludes with an eight-part fugue. The more homophonic middle movement is also antiphonal – Choir II sings the third verse of the chorale "Nun lob, mein Seel, den Herren," while the first choir interpolates another poetic text. The third movement, using a text from Psalm 150, begins with the two choirs once again in dialogue, but concludes with a four-part fugue.

Der Geist Hilt unser Schwachheit auf, BWV 226, was composed in 1729 for the funeral of the rector of the Thomasschule, J. H. Ernesti. It is for double choir. An original set of string and wind parts doubling the voices exists, the use of which may be regarded as a performance option, not as obligatory. The text is from Paul's Epistle to the Romans, concluding with a verse of Martin Luther's Pentecost chorale, "Komm, heiliger Geist." The antiphonal effects found in ***Singet dem Herrn*** are not such a prominent feature in this motet. The first movement concludes with an eight-part fugue, then the two choirs join for a four-voice double fugue. The chorale is used in its most traditional place at the conclusion of the work, in a simple but masterful harmonization.

Jesu, meine Freude, BWV 227, was composed only a few weeks into Bach's tenure in Leipzig, the occasion being the funeral of the head postmaster's widow. Both the biblical text and chorale were apparently specified by the commission. Bach responded with one of his most symmetrical constructions, the eleven movements carefully planned to alternate chorale stanzas with the biblical quotations. The outer movements (1 and 11) use the same music, and important correspondences also exist between movements 2 and 10, movements 3 and 5, and 7 and 9. For example, movements 4 and 8 are both three-part settings, the first for high voices (the basses dropping out) and the second for low voices (without sopranos). The central (sixth) movement is a five-part double fugue.

Fürchte dich nicht, BWV 228, employs verses from the book of Isaiah which were the chosen text for a funeral in January of 1726. It is divided into two large sections. As in ***Singet dem herrn*** and ***Der Geist hilft***, the first movement opens with an antiphonal section followed by a fugue. The setting of the first words "Fear not," is used as refrain, introducing the second section, and returning again at the conclusion of the motet. In the second section the double-choir texture is abandoned and the sopranos sing the chorale "Warum sollt ich mich denn grämen," accompanied by the lower three voices singing an extensive fugue.

Komm, Jesu, komm, BWV 229, is based on two verses of a poem by Paul Thymich, written on the occasion of the death of a rector of the Thomasschule before Bach's time. The poem is a meditation on John 14:6 – "I am the way, the truth, and the life." The long first movement is divided into three sections which correspond to the text, expressing first a longing for peace, then weariness of worldly tribulation, and finally joyous expectation. The work is for double chorus until the final section, an aria, which provides the equivalent of the customary concluding four-part chorale. In this case the melody is apparently by Bach himself, with expressive leaps suggesting more the style of a song for solo voice than a traditional chorale melody.

Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden, BWV 230, is atypical of the motets. It has only four vocal lines throughout, contains no chorale text or chorale tune, and has an independent continuo part. The work was not widely known until it was published in 1821, and is generally considered to be an early work of Bach, composed long before he came to Leipzig. The text is from Psalm 117, concluding with a fugue on the word "Hallelujah." The two fugues which provide the outer sections of the motet are contrasted with a less rhythmically active and more homophonic central section – at the words "for his mercy and truth." As in other works, the greatest contrapuntal complexity – in this case a double fugue – is contained in the first section.

Ich lasse duch nicht, BWV Anh. 159, is another eight-voice motet. Since the early 19th-century, the work has usually been attributed to Johann Christoph Bach, J. S. Bach's father's cousin. The work was long in the repertoire of the Thomasschule in Leipzig, but dates from much earlier, while Bach was at Weimar (1708-1717). The concluding chorale may have been added by Bach for use in Leipzig. Stylistic similarities between this motet and "Fürchte dich nicht" have caused some speculation that the latter work may also have been composed at Weimar, and adapted years later by Bach for performance at a funeral in Leipzig.

Sei Lob und Preis mit Ehren, BWV 231, is another version of the second movement of Cantata 28, "Gottlob! nun geht das Jahr zu Ende" for the First Sunday after Christmas. It is for four voices and is in one movement. As in many opening cantata movements, the chorale melody is present in long note values in the soprano. Unlike a cantata, there are no independent instrumental parts, the continuo simply doubling the vocal bass line. The chorale melody permeates the texture of this work; each of its phrases is preceded by an imitative figure in the lower three voices which is derived from the chorale melody.

– R. Benjamin Dobey

The Washington Bach Consort

The professional musicians and Bach enthusiasts who first assembled informally to share Bach's music in 1977 grew swiftly into a group with a following that filled Dahlgren Chapel at Georgetown University. After three short years, the Washington Bach Consort drew capacity audiences at some of Washington's larger churches, among them the National City Christian Church, the Church of the Epiphany, St. Paul's Lutheran Church and the National Presbyterian Church. From its inception, the Consort's goal was to present Bach's music, in particular the choral works – cantatas, masses, passions, oratorios and motets – as Bach himself did, in a church setting. As the calibre of the Consort chorus and orchestra won recognition, it expanded its concert venues to include performances in the Kennedy Center Concert Hall and the Terrace Theater. Overseas tours further increased the Consort's following. In 1985, during a tour of East and West Germany, the Bach Consort was the only North American ensemble invited to perform during the International Bach Festival, commemmorating the 300th anniversary of Bach's birth. This concert was presented in Leipzig's Neues Gewandhaus. The Washington Bach Consort also appears occasionaly as a guest ensemble in the music of other composers. Guest appearances have included performances with the National Symphony Orchestra under Gerard Schwarz, Zubin Mehta, Rafael Frübeck de Burgos and Christoper Hogwood. A highlight of the 1989 season included two concerts at the prestigious Piccolo Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina, where the Consort was heralded for its "gift of organization and polish, solidity and brilliance... surprassingly beautiful."

J. Reilly Lewis, Music Director

Founder and Music Director of the Washington Bach Consort, J. Reilly Lewis has built his distinctive career in the city where he was raised, Washington – and has focused his many talents on what he terms "the inestimable joy of Bach." Mr. Lewis received a B.A. from the Oberlin Conversatory of Music and earned his master's and doctoral degrees from The Juilliard School. He was the youngest contestant ever to win the coveted first prize in the National Organ-Playing Competition. His teachers included Nadia Boulanger, Anthony Newman and Helmut Walcha, with whom he spent a year in Germany specializing in Bach as a Fulbright Scholar. A harpsichoridst, pianist, organist and conductor, Dr. Lewis has been a guest performer with the International Handel Festival in Halle and the International Bach Festival in Leipzig. He is resident keyboard artist and Associate Conductor of the Handel Festival Orchestra and organist/choirmaster at the Clarendon Methodist Church in Arlington, Virginia. In 1985, he succeeded Paul Calloway as music director of the Cathedral Choral Society.

The Washington Bach Consort Chorus

soprano
Joellen Brassfield
Mickey Fuson
Jan Gannon
Amity Hall
Helen Hammond
Cynthia Lapp
Laura Lewis
Susan Madderom
Joan McFarland
Barbara Van Woerkorn

alto
Brenda Arthur
Leslis Bearden
Susan Bofinger
Stephen Gleason
Sharon Gratto
Barbara Hollinshead
Sue Ross
Claudia Schmitz
Jill Steinberg
Kimberley Wheat

continuo
Marion Baker - cello
Deborah Milan - cello
Jeffrey Koczela - bass
William Neil - organ

tenor
Douglas Dykstra
Mark Fittipaldi
Marshall Ginn
Rollin Marquis
Jeffrey McCracken
Byron Peters
James Pierce
Martin Rosol
Robert Thompson
John Wiecking
Bruce Wilson

bass
Paul Appeldoorn
Jay Baylon
John Becker
Rick Bell
R. Benjamin Dobey
Bart Hewitt
Thomas Hollenhorst
Tom Kramer
William Kugel
Alan Mayers
John Ross

J. Reilly Lewis,
Music Director
R. Benjamin Dobey,
Associate Conductor

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Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied, BWV 225

Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied,
Die Gemeine der Heiligen sollen ihn loben.
Israel freue sich des, der ihn gemacht hat.
Die Kinder Zion sei'n fröhlich über ihrem Könige,
Sie sollen loben seinen Namen imReihen;
Mit Pauken und mit Harfen sollen sie ihm spielen.
Wie sich ein Vater erbarmet,
Gott nimm dich ferrner unser an,
Uber seine junge Kinderlein,
So tut der Herr uns Armen,
So wir ihn kindlich fürchten rein.
Er kennt das arm Gemächte,
Gott weiss, wir sind nur Staub,
Denn ohn dich ist nichts getan
Mit allen unsern Sachen.
Gleichwie das Gras vom Rechen
Ein Blum und fallend Laub.
Der Wind nur drüber wehet,
So ist es nicht mehr da,
Drum sei du unser Schirm und Licht,
Und trügt uns unsre Hoffnung nicht,
So wirst du's ferner machen.
Also der Mensch vergehet,
Sein end, das ist ihn nah.
Wohl dem, der sich nur steif und fest
Auf dich und deine Huld verlässt.

Lobet den Herrn in seinen Taten,
lobet ihn in seiner grossen Herrlichkeit!
Alles, was Odem hat, lobe den Herrn, halleluja!

Sing to the Lord a new song,
The assembly of the saints shall praise him.
Israel is glad in him who hath made him.
Let the children of Zion rejoice in him who is their majesty King,
They shall praise his Name in dance;
With timbrels and with harps shal they play unto him.
As a father shows mercy
God, watch over us in the future,
On his young children,
So does the Lord unto us,
If we fear him with childlike purity,
He recognizes our frail humanity,
God knows we are but dust,
For without you we accomplish nothing
Despite all our wisdom,
Like the grass fallen from the rake,
Or a flower and a fallen leaf.
If the wind only blows over it,
It is no longer there.
Therefore be our shield and light
And if our hope is not in vain,
You will be watching over us henceforth.
In the same way shall man perish,
His end is very near.
Happy is he who firmly and enduringly
Depends on you and your grace.

Praise the Lord in his deeds, praise him in His
great majesty! Let everything that has breath
praise the Lord, hallelujah!

Komm, Jesu, Komm BWV 229

Komm, Jesu, Komm
Lein Leib ish müde,
Die Kraft verschwindt je mehr und mehr,
ich sehne mich
Nach deinem Friede;
Der saure Weg wird mir zu schwer!
Komm, ich will mich dir ergeben;
Du bist der rechte Weg,
Die Wahrheit und das Leben.

Drum schliess ich mich in deine Hände
Und sage, Welt, zu guter Nacht!
Eilt gleich mein Lebenslauf zu Ende,
Ist doch der Geist wohl angebracht,
Er soll bei seinem Schöpfer schweben,
Weil Jesus ist und bleibt
Der wahre Weg zum leben.

Come, Jesus, come!
My body is tired,
and my strength is waning more and more.
I long
for your peace.
The arduous path is becoming too hard for me.
Come, let me be Your servant.
You are the right path,
the truth and life.

Therefore I give myself into Your hands
and bid good night to the world.
Though my life may be ended,
my spirit is content.
It shall stay near its creator
because Jesus is and remains
the true path to life.

Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden, BWV 230

Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden,
und preiset ihn, alle Völker!
Denn seine Gnade und Wahrheit
waltet über uns
in Ewigheit, Halleluja!

Praise the Lord, all heathens,
and praise Him, all peoples!
For His mercy and truth
rule over us
forever, Hallelujah!

Ich lasse dich nicht, BWV Anh. 159

Ich lasse dich nicht, mein Jesu
Du segnest mich denn.

Weil du mein Gott und Vater bist,
Dein Kind wirst du verlassen nicht,
Du väterliches Herz,
Ich bin ein armer Erdenkloss,
Auf Erden weiss ich keinen Trost.

I will not abandon you, my Jesus,
for your will bless me.

Since you are my God and Father,
You will not desert your child,
dear fatherly heart,
I am a wretched clump of earth
and on earth I find no solace.

Sei lob und Preis mit Ehren, BWV 231

Sei Lob und Preis mit Ehren
Gott Vater, Sohn und Heiligen Geist,
Der woll in uns vermehren,
Was er aus Gnaden uns verheisst,
Dass wir ihm fest vertrauen,
Gänzlich verlass'n auf ihn,
Von Herzen auf ihn bauen,
Dass uns'r Herz, Mut und Sinn
Ihm tröstlich sol'n anhanger,
Drafu singen wir zur Stund:
Amen, wir werd'ns erlangen,
Glaub'n wir aus Herzengrund.

Give glory, praise and honor
to Father, Son and Holy Ghost
Who multiplies with favor
his kind and gracious promise blest.
May we in faith believe him,
Put all our trust in him,
Incline our hearts to love him,
That heart and mind alone
may rest their faith upon him,
and so we sing this day:
Amen, for we shall gain him
if in our hearts we pray.

Jesu, meine Freude, BWV 227

Jesu, mein Freude,
Meines Herzens Weide,
Jesu, meine Zier,
Ach wie lange,
Ish dem Herzen lange
Und verlangt nach dir!
Gottes Lamm, mein Bräutigam,
Ausser dir soll mir auf Erden
Nichts sonst Liebers werden.

Jesus, my joy,
My heart's delight,
Jesus, my treasure,
Oh, how long, how long
Does my fearful heart
Yearn for you.
Lamb of God, my bridegroom,
I shall cherish nothing
More than you on earth.

Es ist nun nichts Verdammliches an denen, die in Christo Jesu sind, die nicht mahc dem Fleische wandeln, sondern nach dem Geist.

There is nothing damnable in those who are in Jesus Christ and who are not guided by the flesh but by the spirit.

Unter deinem Schirmen
Bin ich vor den Stürmen
Aller Feinde frei.
Lass den Satan wittern,
Lass denn Feind erbittern,
Mir steht Jesus bei.
Ob es itzt gleich kracht und blitzt,
Ob gleich Sünd und Hölle schrecken:
Jesus will mich decken.

Beneath Your shield
I am safe from the assault
of all enemies.
Let Satan hunt me,
Let the enemy rage,
Jesus will help me.
Whether there be thunder and lightning,
Whether I be threathened by sin and hell,
Jesus will guard me.

Denn das Gesetz des Geister, der da lebendig machet in Christo Jesu, hat mich frei gemacht von dem Gesetz der Sünde und des Todes.

Trotz dem alten Drachen,
Trotz des Todes Rachen,
Trotz der Furcht darzu!
Tobe, Welt, und springe,
Ich steh hier und singe
In gar sichrer Ruh.
Goltes Macht hält mich in acht;
Erd und Abgrund muss verstummen,
Ob sie noch so brummen.

Ihr aber seid nicht fleischlich, sondern geistlich, so anders Gottes Geist in euch wohnet. Wer aber Christi Geist nicht hat, der ist nicht sein.

Weg mit allen Schätzen!
Du bist mein Ergözen,
Jesu, meine Lust!
Weg, ihr eitlen Ehren,
Ich mag euch nicht hören,
Bleibt mir unbewusst!
Elend, Not, Kreuz, Schmach und Tod
Soll mich, ob ich viel muss leiden,
Nicht von Jesu scheiden.

So aber Christus in euch ist, so ist der Leib zwar tot um der Sünde willen; der Geist aber ist das Leben um der Gerechtigkeit willen.

Gute Nacht, o Wesen,
Das die Welt erlesen,
Mir gefällst du nicht.
Gute Nacht, ihr Sünden,
Bleibet weit dahinten,
Kommt nicht mehr ans Licht!
Gute Nacht, do Stolz und Pracht!
Dir sei ganz, du Lasterleben,
Gute Nacht gegeben.

So nun der Geist des, der Jesum von den Toten auferwecket hat, in euch wohnet, so wird auch derselbige, der Christum von dein Toten auferwecket hat, eure sterbliche Leiber lebendig machen um des willen, dass sein Geist in euch wohnet.

Weicht, ihn Trauergeister,
Denn mein Fruedenmeister,
Jesus, tritt herein.
Denen, die Gott lieben,
Muss auch ihr betrüben
Lauter Freude sein.

For the law of the spirit who makes us live in Jesus Christ has freed me from the law of sin and death.

Defy the old dragon,
Deft the jaws of death,
Deft all terrors!
Rage, world, and riot,
I stand here and sing
In calm san safety.
God's might shields me
Earth and abyss must fall silent,
However much they may grumble.

But you are not of the flesh but of the Spirit, and God's spirit dwells in you. But he who does not have the spirit of Christ cannot be His.

Away with all treasures.
You are my delight,
Jesus, my desire.
Hence, vain honors
Let me not hear of you
Out of my mind!
Pain, misery, shame, and death
Shall not - though I suffer much -
Part me from Jesus.

But if Christ is in you, then, though the body must die for its sins, the spirit shall live because it is just.

Good night, you creature
Who is chosen of this world.
I dislike you.
Good night, sins.
Remain far behind
Do not come forth into the light.
Good night, pride and splendor.
To you, life of vice,
I bid good night.

But if the spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead live in you, then He who raised Jesus from the dea will give eternal life to you mortal bodies because his spirit lives in you.

Hence, you mournful spirits!
For my joyful master,
Jesus, is coming
To those who love God,
Even their affliction
Must be pure joy.

Duld ich schon heir Spott un Hohn,
Dennoch bleibst du auch im Leide,
Jesu, meine Freude.

Though I may suffer scorn and derision,
You remain, even in my suffering,
Jesus, my joy.

Fürchte dich nict, ich bin bei dir, BWV 228

Fürchte dich nicht, ich bin bei dir;
weiche nicht, denn ich bin dein Gott!
Ich stärke dich, ich helfe dir auch,
ich erhalte dich durch die rechte Hand
meiner Gerechtigkeit.

Have no fear, for I am near you;
do not flee from me, for I am your God!
I fortify you, I help you,
and I maintain you by the right hand
of my justice.

Fürchte dich night, denn ich habe dich erlöset,
ich habe dich bei deinem Namen gerufen,
du bist mein!

Have no fear, for I have redeemed you.
I have called you by your name,
you are mine!

Herr, mein Hirt, Brunn aller Freuden,
Du bist mein, ich bin dein,
Niemand kann uns scheiden.
Ich bin dein, weil du dein Leben
Und dein Blut mir zugut
In den Tod gegeben.

Lord, my shepherd, font of all joy,
You are mine, I am Yours.
No one can part us.
I am yours because you gave
Your life and Your blood
for me.

Du bist mein, weil ich dich fasse,
Und dich nicht, o mein Licht,
Aus dem Herzen lasse.
Lass mich, lass mich hingelangen,
Da du mich und ich dich
Lieblich werd umfangen.

You are mine because I hold You
and do not let You, oh my light,
out of my heart.
Let me, let me reach the place
where You and I
shall lovingly embrace.

Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf, BWV 226

Der Geist hilft unser Schwachheit auf,
denn wir wissen nicht, was wir beten sollen,
wie sich's gebühret;
sondern der Geist selbst vertritt uns aufs beste
mit unaussprechlichern Seufzen.
Der aber die Herzen forchet, der weiss
was der Geistes Sinn sei; denn er vertritt die
Heiligen nach dem, das Gott gefället.

The spirit helps us overcome our weakness
for we know not how to pray,
as is proper,
but the spirit itself intercedes for us,
with inexpressible sighing.
But he who explored the hearts understands
the spirit; for it speaks for the saints
in a manner that pleases God.

Du heilige Brunst, süsser Trost,
Nun hilf uns, fröhlich und getrost
In deinem Dienst beständig bleiben,
Die Trübsal uns nicht abtreiben.
O Herr, durch dein Kraft uns bereit
Und stärk des Fleisches Blödigkeit,
Dass wir hie ritterich ringen,
Durch Tod und Leben zu dir dringen.
Halleluja, halleluja.

Holy yearning, sweet comfort,
help us that we may, with joy and confidence,
remain steadfastly in Your service
and not be driven away by gloom,
Oh Lord, prepare us through Your strength
and strengthen the weak flesh
that we may struggle bravely on earth,
and finally reach You through death and life.
Hallelujah, hallelujah.

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